

## BEST BEGINNINGS CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM PROGRAM REMINDERS

**- KEEP FOR YOUR RECORDS -**

**You will need to turn in these documents within 30 days to complete the application.**

- Copies of birth certificates and social security cards for all household members new to the scholarship program.
- Verification of Montana residency for all household members new to the scholarship program.
- Work verifications completed and signed by the employers of every employed household member.
- Two months of consecutive wage stubs for all employed household members, must be within the past 60 days.
- Child Support verification for every child with an absent parent. Acceptable documentation must be a compliance statement from the Child Support Enforcement Division or a copy of a current court-ordered parenting plan and copies of the last three month's payments made by check or money order.
- A current Child Care Service Plan with a certified, licensed or registered provider.

### Things to Remember

**Eligibility for child care assistance begins only when all of the following criteria are met:**

1. Your Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) has received a complete and signed application;
2. Proof of income eligibility has been received by the CCR&R;
3. Proof of parent work and/or school schedules verifying the need for child care has been received by the CCR&R;
4. The family has identified an approved child care provider; and
5. If your family has an absent parent then the family must either receive child support through a court-order, be in-compliance with the Montana Child Support Enforcement Division, or have reason to pursue good cause for not receiving child support

**Families may qualify for 30 days of presumptive eligibility – ask your eligibility specialist.**

**Your child care scholarship is certified for a set period of time.**

**It is important that you:**

- Read all notices you receive carefully.
- Mark the date that your child care scholarship expires on your calendar;
- Mark another date to submit updated information 3-6 weeks before the expiration date.
- Re-certifying requires updating and verifying the information listed above.

**Scholarship participants are required to complete a new application annually.**

**It is your responsibility to get your Best Beginnings scholarship re-certified. If you haven't done so by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month in which your scholarship expires, you may experience a gap in child care coverage.**

You have agreed to notify the Child Care Resource & Referral agency **before or within one business day** of changing child care providers.

You have agreed to report changes in employment, school, and address to your Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) **within 10 calendar days**. If you **do not** report changes, you will lose your child care scholarship and will have to repay all child care scholarship assistance paid during the period you were ineligible.

You have agreed to pay a monthly co-payment to your child care provider before the end of the month in which the care is provided or on the provider's due date as determined by their contract.

## The Family's Rights

1. I may choose my child care provider. My provider must be a current Certified, Licensed or Registered Provider. I must select a provider before receiving child care assistance. I understand that State child care scholarship assistance will not be paid if the provider does not have a current state payment number. This may happen if the certification, license or registration payment number expires or is terminated.
2. I have the right to have access to my child at any time while he or she is at child care.
3. Within 10 days of losing employment or falling below the minimum work requirement, I may request a grace period for child care assistance for the purpose of looking for work; limitations may apply. I can contact my Child Care Resource and Referral agency for details and an application.
4. If my Best Beginnings Scholarship benefits are reduced, I will be notified. A letter is mailed by the State 15 calendar days before any loss of benefits.
5. I have the right to appeal any loss of scholarship assistance. If I choose to do so, I will submit the request for a Fair Hearing in writing within 90 days of the date the notice was mailed.
6. I understand the child care provider shall NOT discriminate against any child based on his or her sex, race, national origin, ethnic background, religious affiliation, or disability.
7. I understand the child care provider shall keep all information regarding my family confidential.
8. I understand my child care provider shall notify me if a negative licensing action affects my eligibility for a child care scholarship.
9. I understand that neither the State of Montana nor the Child Care Resource and Referral agency have a role in the parent/provider relationship. Parent/provider payment issues and termination notice issues are solely the responsibility of the parent and the provider.
10. I will receive a monthly "Explanation of Benefits" (EOB) informing me of child care scholarship benefits paid on my behalf.

## The Family's Responsibilities

1. I must submit a completed scholarship application before eligibility can be determined. The date the CCR&R receives my completed application and I am eligible is my application date. **Child care services delivered before that date will not be covered by my Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship. My child care provider may contact the CCR&R to confirm the application date.**
2. I am responsible for paying my own child care if my family is determined to be or becomes ineligible for benefits, or if program funds become unavailable. I am responsible for paying my own child care until my family is determined eligible for benefits and selected from the waiting list.
3. If I do not currently receive child support under child support order recognized by a Montana district court, I must apply for child support services and comply with the Montana Child Support Enforcement Division.
4. I will pay a monthly co-payment to the child care provider. If I fail to pay the co-payment, or fail to make satisfactory arrangements, I will lose eligibility for child care assistance.
5. I understand the child care provider may set rates independent of the state district child care provider rates. Providers may charge rates and/or fees in addition to the child care program co-payment obligation. I am responsible for any amount over and above the State's district child care rate.
6. If child care is provided in my home, the child care provider is either my employee or an independent contractor. As an employer, I am responsible for all employment obligations, such as payment, Worker's Compensation Insurance and employment taxes. I may obtain additional information from my Child Care Resource & Referral agency.
7. If I change to a new child care provider, I must notify my current provider.
8. If I change to a new child care provider, I must notify the CCR&R prior to or within one business day of the change. Assistance will not be paid to the new provider until a new certification plan is created.
9. I will report changes in the following items within ten 10 days of the change:
  - Changes in employment of any member of my household;
  - Loss of employment to less than 60 hours per month for a single parent family or 120 hours per month for a two parent family;
  - Changes in residence or mailing address;
  - Changes in school attendance; and
  - Entering or leaving the TANF program.
  - **The opening or closing of my child support case, changes in child support received, or changes to my good cause**
10. Failure to report changes within 10 calendar days will result in one or more of the following:
  - Loss of State Child Care Scholarship;
  - Obligation to repay any child care scholarship assistance paid during my period of ineligibility; and/or
  - Loss of opportunity to use the child care grace period to look for work if I drop below the minimum work requirement or lose my employment.
11. I will report any discrepancies I discover with regard to child care scholarship assistance received and reported on the EOB to my CCR&R.

## The Child Care Provider's Rights and Responsibilities

1. The provider has the right to receive a copy of the Child Care Certification Plan. This identifies the start date, the ending date, the hours of child care authorized for this family and the co-payment amount due.
2. If the family's circumstances change and they lose eligibility for scholarship assistance before the "end date" shown on the Child Care Certification Plan, notice will be mailed to the provider 10 days before the end of scholarship assistance.
3. The provider sets their own rates for child care services, which may be more or less than the State district rates.
4. The provider has the right to timely payment for State-assisted child care services.
5. If the following dates fall on weekdays, the provider can anticipate the following payment schedule (weekends and holidays may delay this schedule):
  - a. Invoices are mailed to the provider during the month in which care is received.
  - b. Invoices must be submitted to the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency immediately following the month in which care is provided.
  - c. Invoices are processed on the fifth business day of the month and on subsequent Tuesdays. Payments generally arrive in 2 to 3 business days after processing.
  - d. A Direct Deposit option is available to electronically transfer payments to a payee's bank account.
  - e. If an invoice or payment is late, please contact the local CCR&R agency.
  - f. If the payment address is incorrect, the payment will be sent by return mail back to the State. Allow a minimum of one week's delay for the payment to be returned to the State, the correct address located, and the payment to be re-mailed. (This delay can be avoided by notifying the local child care licensor and submitting a new IRS W-9 form before any address change.)
  - g. If an error in payment occurs, the State/CCR&R will make adjustments in future payments. Outstanding accounts are referred to DPHHS Accounts Receivable and DOR Tax Offset for collection.
  - h. If a payment is delayed, the Early Childhood Services Bureau will work with the local Child Care Resource and Referral agency, computer system personnel, and the fiscal office to solve the problem and issue the payment.
6. The provider has the right to request payment for holding a child care slot if the slot will be lost during a scheduled absence. The absence may not last longer than 30 days and the provider must provide a list of waiting children to verify that another child would otherwise fill the slot. This same policy must apply to all families.
7. The provider must understand that the child care scholarship is available only during the parent's approved activities, which may be less than maximum limits indicated on the child care certification plan.
8. The provider will not discriminate against any child based on his or her sex, race, national origin, ethnic background, religious affiliation, or disability.
9. The provider must keep all information regarding this family confidential, except for the following circumstances:
  - Attendance information must be shared with the CCR&R, with regard to eligibility for the Child Care Scholarship program;
  - As a registered or licensed provider, they are a mandatory reporter of suspected child abuse or neglect and will report the concerns directly to Child and Family Services at 1-866-820-KIDS (5437); and
  - The provider will cooperate with Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and local law enforcement investigating child care licensing issues.
10. The provider will abide by and maintain applicable center licensing, family or group home registration, or legally certified provider requirements (ARM 37.95.101-1021). The provider status must be current in order to serve families and receive payment for families receiving Child Care Scholarship assistance.
11. Families eligible for a Best Beginnings Scholarship must choose a provider who holds a current certification, license or registration payment number. The provider must immediately notify parents if a negative licensing action affects their eligibility to serve Best Beginnings Scholarship families.
12. The provider will notify the Child Care Licensor and submit a new IRS W-9 form when my address changes: physical address, mailing address, or payment (warrant) address. A payment delay may occur if this does not occur timely.
13. The provider will report the current rates charged to non-scholarship families to the Child Care Resource & Referral agency. These rates are used to facilitate the payment process and they are included in a biennial market rate survey. New rates may be reported on the invoice.
14. The provider understands that their rates for private-pay families may not be lower than those for scholarship-assisted families.
15. The provider understands that when they report rate changes to the CCR&R, the new rate will not take effect until the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month following the month in which the change was reported.
16. The provider understands that they are solely responsible for any terms of agreements they have with the parent(s).
17. The provider will notify the CCR&R if a child is absent for 5 days without notice.

## The Child Care Provider's Rights and Responsibilities (continued...)

18. The provider will maintain current sign-in/sign-out records for each child receiving child care assistance and utilize them as follows:
  - Each time the child enters or leaves the provider's care, the parent or other individual authorized to deliver or pick up the child shall initial or sign the sign-in/sign-out sheet. An electronic signature system may be used if it employs a unique and confidential identification process for individuals.
  - Sign-in/sign-out records must indicate the child's name, the date, the hour, and the minute when the child enters and leaves the provider's care.
  - The provider will make sign-in/sign-out records available to child care resource and referral agency staff and state and local government health, safety, or law enforcement representatives upon request. The provider shall keep sign-in/sign-out records for five years beyond the date of attendance.
19. The provider will claim actual care provided, when the parent is participating in approved activities, as designated on the child care certification plan, and subject to the limitation of continuity-of-care policies. The provider may not bill for care subcontracted to another individual or facility.
20. As a provider, eligibility to receive state payment under a state assisted child care program may be terminated if:
  - The provider willfully misrepresent services provided, with respect to sign-in/sign-out records, attendance billed on invoices; or
  - The provider refuse access to the child care setting and child care records during business hours to the following personnel:
    - employees or other agents of state or local government, investigating child care services, or child abuse or neglect;
    - child care resource and referral agency personnel investigating child care services; or
    - health, building, or fire officials investigating child care facility health and safety issues.
21. Child care providers have 60 days to submit claims for services:
  - Providers must submit invoices to the CCR&R within 60 days of the service month to be eligible for payment.
  - If the child care certification plan is not available during the service month, the invoice is due at the district CCR&R with 60 days following the provider's receipt of the invoice.
  - If corrections or adjustments to an invoice are necessary, they must be received by the CCR&R within the 60-day period prescribed.
22. When a provider or a parent receives child care assistance in excess of the amount to which the provider or parent is entitled, which is due to a willful action of the provider or parent, the department may pursue criminal charges against the provider or parent. Criminal prosecution may be pursued in addition to recovery of the overpayment.

### Willful Action

A **willful action** includes but is not limited to the making of a false or misleading statement. A misrepresentation or the concealment or withholding of facts or information. If a willful action results in an overpayment, the following will occur:

1. The first willful action will result in a 10% assessment being added to the amount of repayment due. If the provider is found responsible copies of sign-in/sign-out sheets must be submitted with invoices for the following three months.
2. The second willful action will result in a 25% assessment being added to the amount of repayment due. If the provider is found responsible, copies of sign-in/sign-out sheets must be submitted with invoices for the following six months.
3. The third willful action will result in the household or provider being ineligible to participate in the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship assistance program, Best Beginnings grants, and other Best Beginnings Quality Child Care Programs.

### Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship Reimbursement Rates

The scholarship will reimburse at the lower of the rates that apply to non-Best Beginnings Scholarship families or the CCR&R district rates.

### Certified Enrollment Hours

Certified enrollment allows a registered/licensed provider to bill for some absences. A registered/licensed provider may claim certified enrollment hours only if the provider charges non-scholarship families for absence days and the child is attending the facility full time (30+ hours per week). A child is limited to 70 CE hours during a State fiscal year (July 1—June 30).